A Study of the Patterns and Determinants of Voting Behaviour in the Vijayraghavgarh Assembly Constituency, with Reference to the 2023 Katni District Elections in Madhya Pradesh

Atit Tiwari (Researcher)
Dr. Ramsiya Charmkar
(Supervisor)
Faculty of Political Science
Rabindranath Tagore
University, Raisen.

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Abstract

(This paper critically examines the voting behaviour of the Vijayraghavgarh assembly constituency during the 2023 Madhya Pradesh legislative elections. Utilizing quantitative electoral data and qualitative insights from local demographics, the study dissects the interplay of social, economic, and political components that shape voter preferences in Katni district. With a turnout exceeding 78%, the 2023 contest—primarily between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC)—highlights the significance of gender, caste, and literacy as pivotal determinants in the evolving political landscape. The research delves into party strategies, influence of local leadership, the role of identity politics, and emerging trends witnessed in the post-liberalization era. Methodologically, the analysis is grounded in secondary data and established theoretical models of voting behaviour, thereby situating Vijayraghavgarh's electoral patterns within broader socio-political transformations in Madhya Pradesh. The results illustrate a dynamic but tradition-rooted electorate, with implications for future campaign strategies and policy interventions aimed at enhancing democratic participation and representation.)

1. Demographic Profile and Electoral Landscape

The Vijayraghavgarh assembly constituency in Katni district represents a distinctive blend of rural and semi-urban voting behaviour, illustrating how local demographics shape political participation. Home to nearly 233,100 registered voters—comprising 120,800 men, 112,900 women, and a marginal representation of others—the constituency reflects a relatively balanced gender composition that sets it apart from broader state trends. Its literacy

rate, estimated at 81.51 percent, exceeds the state average and has contributed to a more informed electorate capable of evaluating political alternatives with greater awareness. Socially, the population is characterized by an intricate mix of Brahmin, Thakur, Koli tribal groups, and various backward-class communities, creating a diverse socio-cultural framework that influences how political parties approach mobilization and outreach.

Electoral history in Vijayraghavgarh reveals a gradual intensification of political competition, with recent elections showcasing more fluid and dynamic patterns of voter alignment. The 2023 assembly election particularly underscored this transformation, as socio-economic expectations played a role in reshaping traditional loyalties. The Bharatiya Janata Party secured a clear lead with 98,010 votes (52.99%), while the Indian National Congress followed with 73,664 votes (39.83%). Despite their relatively modest vote shares, independent candidates and smaller parties have often shaped final margins by drawing support from localized networks, thereby contributing to the constituency's active democratic character. Such outcomes reflect a shift toward issues-based preferences, although identity-linked voting remains influential.

The interplay between demographic composition and electoral strategies is especially evident in how political parties craft their campaigns. Recognizing the heterogeneity of the region, parties tailor their narratives to address the expectations of different social groups, whether rooted in caste identity, development needs, or livelihood concerns. This targeted communication has strengthened the constituency's electoral vibrancy, where competing narratives of social aspiration, governance performance, and community representation intersect. Consequently, Vijayraghavgarh's political climate is shaped not only by party competition but also by the evolving priorities of its electorate. These dynamics continue to influence both electoral outcomes and decision-making processes at the local level, underscoring the lasting connection between demographic realities and political behaviour.

2. Historical Perspective and Voting Patterns

The historical development of voting behaviour in the Vijayraghavgarh constituency demonstrates how political preferences have gradually adapted to social and regional shifts. Earlier elections were largely dominated by loyalty-driven voting, where long-standing political families and influential personalities shaped electoral choices. This pattern mirrored broader political traditions seen across Madhya Pradesh and central India during the early 2000s. Over time, however, the constituency began to witness a slow but steady departure from personality-centric politics. The elections of 2013, 2018, and particularly 2023

highlight this change, with voters increasingly focusing on performance, governance concerns, and candidate credibility. This gradual shift indicates a constituency that is developing a more evaluative approach toward political participation.

The transformation becomes more pronounced when examining specific electoral outcomes. In 2013, the Congress candidate Sanjay Pathak secured the seat, but by 2018 the electorate repositioned its support behind the Bharatiya Janata Party's Sanjay Satyendra Pathak, reaffirming this preference again in 2023. Such shifts reflect evolving expectations among voters and a willingness to alter party allegiance when convinced by leadership, programmatic promises, or policy delivery. Notably, voter turnout has remained consistently high, exceeding 77 percent in consecutive elections, demonstrating the constituency's strong commitment to democratic participation. This heightened engagement is often associated with coordinated mobilization strategies, social media–based communication, and rising awareness facilitated by improved literacy levels.

When interpreted through broader theoretical frameworks, these patterns reveal a complex interplay between socio-cultural factors and political preferences. Aggregate or ecological analyses suggest that local considerations—such as community-specific issues, leadership visibility, and immediate development needs—carry greater weight than overarching party identities. Similarly, individual-level behavioural assessments indicate that while rational evaluation is growing, traditional determinants like caste affiliations and economic positioning still play a crucial role in shaping outcomes. Booth-level data further reinforces this, displaying pockets of support aligned with settlement patterns and occupational clusters. Overall, the constituency's electoral history reflects a blend of continuity and change, driven by shifting socio-economic realities and evolving political consciousness.

3. Determinants of Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour in the Vijayraghavgarh constituency is shaped by a multi-layered interaction of social identity, economic realities, and psychological motivations. Among these, caste remains one of the most influential determinants, as communities such as Brahmins, Thakurs, and Koli tribal groups often display distinctive political preferences influenced by local leadership and the promises extended by contesting parties. Caste-based associations frequently act as channels for electoral persuasion, guiding collective decision-making within families and neighbourhood clusters. Although issue-oriented voting has gradually gained ground, particularly in more literate or semi-urban pockets, enduring caste

loyalties continue to strongly influence electoral behaviour, especially in regions where traditional power structures still hold significance.

Gender-related considerations also play a decisive role in shaping the constituency's voting patterns. The relatively balanced distribution of male and female voters has encouraged political parties to integrate women-focused agendas into their campaign strategies. Themes such as safety, financial inclusion, education, and welfare have become prominent components of electoral discourse. In recent years, female turnout has shown steady improvement, supported by targeted government schemes and local engagement efforts that emphasize women's empowerment. Alongside this shift, the increasing visibility of young and first-time voters has expanded the focus of political messaging, drawing attention to aspirations connected to employment, quality education, and accessible infrastructure, all of which feature prominently in campaign narratives.

Economic circumstances intersect with psychological evaluations of leadership to further shape voting preferences. Many voters adopt a pragmatic approach, assessing candidates based on expected benefits, development commitments, or their perceived capacity to deliver tangible improvements. For economically vulnerable populations, welfare provision and income-support programmes often serve as important incentives. In contrast, traders, salaried employees, and emerging middle-class households tend to favour stability, administrative efficiency, and growth-oriented governance. These diverse yet interconnected motivations highlight the constituency's complex political environment, where identity-linked considerations coexist with rational assessments of development prospects. Together, these determinants illustrate how social, economic, and attitudinal factors collectively influence evolving electoral behaviour in Vijayraghavgarh.

4. Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaign Strategies

The 2023 electoral competition in Vijayraghavgarh reflected a sophisticated interplay of party narratives, candidate positioning, and evolving campaign strategies. Both major political contenders—the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress— nominated experienced leaders familiar with local socio-political dynamics. BJP's candidate, Sanjay Satyendra Pathak, and Congress's representative, Neeraj Bhagel, relied heavily on their established grassroots connections to appeal to diverse voter groups. The BJP focused its efforts on strengthening booth-level coordination and capitalizing on its performance record, particularly in infrastructure and welfare delivery. These components

formed the backbone of its campaign, enabling the party to consolidate support across multiple communities.

In contrast, the Congress campaign centred around projecting discontent with the incumbent government by drawing attention to persistent economic and administrative challenges. Themes such as unemployment, agricultural hardships, and governance gaps were emphasized to resonate with sections of the electorate dissatisfied with local development outcomes. Although smaller parties and independent candidates did not command significant vote shares, their presence added complexity to the electoral landscape. By attracting narrow but targeted bases of support, they often influenced tight margins in specific polling booths. This multi-layered participation expanded the scope of political competition, involving women's collectives, youth groups, and caste-based associations, thereby enriching the intensity of pre-election mobilization.

Campaign practices during the 2023 election further demonstrated the growing centrality of tailored communication and technology-driven outreach. Political actors increasingly utilized social media, including messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, to circulate information, reinforce party narratives, and mobilize supporters rapidly. Regional influencers and community leaders were also engaged to enhance local visibility and credibility. Traditional campaign methods—public rallies, door-to-door canvassing, and targeted community gatherings—remained central in addressing constituency-specific issues and building interpersonal connections with voters. These combined efforts contributed to the constituency's notably high turnout, highlighting not only voter enthusiasm but also the effectiveness of integrated campaign techniques that blended digital reach with on-ground engagement.

5. Voter Turnout, Participation, and Representation

Voter turnout in the Vijayraghavgarh constituency serves as a strong indicator of the region's active democratic engagement, consistently exceeding the state's average participation rate. In the 2023 assembly election, a turnout of 77.36 percent underscored the electorate's willingness to engage with the political process. This steady participation is supported by initiatives aimed at strengthening voter awareness, enhanced accessibility through upgraded polling facilities, and reliable security measures that encourage marginalized communities and first-time voters to exercise their franchise without hesitation. Over the years, civic organizations and community groups have played a crucial role in

motivating women and minority populations to vote, helping narrow long-standing gaps in participation.

A closer examination of turnout distribution highlights important spatial patterns across the constituency. Areas with active community institutions, such as cooperatives, women's groups, or youth associations, tend to record higher participation due to greater civic mobilization. Government outreach programmes targeting Scheduled Caste and Tribal settlements have also improved engagement in previously underrepresented clusters. In contrast, rapidly urbanizing pockets near Katni town show increasing involvement from middle-class households, whose voting behaviour is often shaped by concerns regarding employment prospects, municipal services, and the efficiency of local governance. These variations demonstrate how socio-economic contexts influence electoral engagement differently across the constituency.

Post-election assessments point to significant distinctions between voter participation and meaningful representation. While the electoral process ensures that diverse groups have the opportunity to cast their votes, translating this procedural inclusion into substantive political influence remains an ongoing challenge. Several sections of the electorate continue to express dissatisfaction with unfulfilled promises or lapses in governance after elections conclude. These concerns highlight the need for continuous dialogue between elected representatives and citizens, emphasizing accountability, policy responsiveness, and sustained community engagement beyond the electoral cycle. Ultimately, strengthening representation requires not only high turnout but also greater attention to ensuring that voter expectations are addressed in governance outcomes.

6. Implications, Trends, and Future Directions

Vijayraghavgarh's electoral behaviour in the 2023 assembly contest provides a valuable analytical lens for understanding wider shifts in democratic engagement within semi-urban and rural constituencies. The emergence of a more coherent two-party structure has enhanced competitive pressures, encouraging candidates to adopt clearer policy positions and to demonstrate responsiveness toward local concerns. Simultaneously, the constituency's consistently high voter turnout reflects not only procedural participation but also a deeper civic consciousness among residents. Socially grounded determinants—particularly caste affiliations, gendered participation patterns, and age-based cohort behaviours—continue to shape voter preferences, even as incremental movement toward

issue-based evaluations and performance-oriented choices becomes increasingly visible in the electorate.

Several contemporary developments are reshaping how political communication and mobilization unfold in Vijayraghavgarh. The growing reliance on digital platforms—ranging from social media outreach to mobile-based informational campaigns—has diversified the channels through which parties interact with constituents. A rising youth electorate, more exposed to media and educational opportunities, is contributing to a more assertive and questioning political culture. Likewise, deliberate strategies aimed at increasing women's electoral participation have yielded observable gains in turnout and policy attentiveness. Localized concerns, especially those linked to natural resource management, employment generation, and small business facilitation, now exert stronger influence on voting choices than in previous electoral cycles, indicating an expanding significance of micro-level governance factors.

These observations carry important implications for future electoral strategies and governance reforms. Political actors will be required to invest more substantially in inclusive outreach frameworks that address the specific needs and aspirations of diverse community clusters. Policymakers must recognize that sustained engagement—beyond campaign periods—remains essential for cultivating trust, ensuring policy compliance, and strengthening democratic legitimacy. For scholars and researchers, Vijayraghavgarh underscores the necessity of attending to intersectional social dynamics and constituency-level variations when interpreting electoral behaviour. Integrating empirical evidence with grounded field insights can contribute to more effective policy recommendations and a richer understanding of India's evolving democratic landscape.

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